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COLIN JACKSON

Colin was born and brought up in Wales, but knows that his parents came from Jamaica in the 1960s. Given the range of ethnic backgrounds associated with Jamaica, Colin's quest revolves around trying to piece together his mixed heritage. To help untangle his roots, Colin started his research by taking a DNA test.

From talking to his parents, Colin is able to piece together some of his history. His maternal grandfather, Dee, arrived in Cardiff in 1955 to find work, and brought his children with him.

Dee's wife Maria elected to stay behind, and returned to her native Panama to look after her sick father. Although she tried to keep in contact with her family, Dee did not pass on any of her letters to their children, fearing they might leave for Panama, and consequently the family lost contact with her.

In the meantime, Dee bought a house in Cardiff, and rented out a room to other economic migrants from Jamaica, which in 1962 included Colin's father, Ossie.

Colin's DNA test results were relatively surprising. His genetic make-up consists of 55% Sub-Saharan African - comparatively low for someone of Jamaican descent - and 38% European, which would appear to come from his mother's side. Yet there was also 7% 'native American', a term used to cover all indigenous people from the Americas, including the original inhabitants of Jamaica, the Taino.

Research has shown that Taino settlements survived beyond European colonisation, and indeed Colin shares some of their facial characteristics: almond eyes and comparatively flat face.

It's likely that their bloodline survived through their links to the 'Maroon' communities - descendants of the original West African slaves brought to Jamaica by the English from 1661.

Through force of arms, the Maroons achieved a semi-independent status in the 18th century, before losing out in the war of 1796. Many were captured and transported to Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone.

Colin was able to use archives in Jamaica to trace his father's family, through certificates, to his mother, Marie Wilson, and her parents, Jacob Wilson and Eugenia Stewart. He found that many of his cousins still live on the island, of whom a large number showed great sporting prowess.

Further back in the family tree, Jacob's father was Adam Wilson, an emancipated slave who was linked to the Greenmount plantation owned by Valentine Dwyer. Although

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Adam died a free man in 1849, he was born into slavery and lived to see the emancipation of his people in 1834.

Yet this emancipation came at a great cost. A slave rebellion in 1831-1832 left 200 dead in the field, and a further 500 were executed afterwards. Adam did not take part, and was able to buy five acres of land at a cost of £25. He was still largely tied to his former master's land, but worked hard to make his own smallholding profitable.

Happy to have provided an explanation for his African and Taino heritage, Colin remained curious about the European side and dug a bit deeper.

From Panama, he obtained his mother's birth certificate, which showed her father was Richard Augustus Packer and her mother was Gladys McGowan Campbell.

Working further back, Gladys's parents were Albertina Wallace and Duncan M Campbell and the trail led back to Jamaica. Duncan Campbell was part of a large Scottish community on the island, and Albertina was his housemaid.

It was not unusual for white 'gentlemen' to have children with their black staff. She was eventually given his house, and then worked as a prison warder - an important position at the time. Her daughter, Gladys, would have been of mixed race, and at some time during her youth would have moved to Panama.

There is a long history of West Indians heading to Panama during the various attempts to build the Panama Canal, first under the French and then under the American team in the first decades of the 20th century.

After some careful research in surviving employment records, Colin found that Richard Packer, Gladys's husband, worked on the canal in 1905 for six months, before finding employment in the hospital. He stayed in Panama until at least 1921, when Maria was born. She returned to look after Richard when he fell ill, leaving her own children to start a new life in Wales with her estranged husband Dee.

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